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SUBJECT: U.S. ELECTION NIGHT CELEBRATION DRAWS RECORD CROWDS

REF: MAPUTO 963

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¶1. SUMMARY: In the final weeks of the 2008 U.S. Election, Mozambicans remained captivated, and Public Affairs Maputo responded with a number of programs, culminating in a grand elections night bash with close to 600 people at the national conference center. The November 4 celebration is not the end of elections programs, however. There is great interest in the transition process and the coming presidency, which provide an excellent opportunity to continue to engage Mozambicans on issues of democratic development and U.S. policy toward Africa. END SUMMARY.

¶2. On November 4, our rented pavilion at Mozambique's National Conference Center was a vision in red, white and blue as close to 600 guests - academics, journalists, civil society, government officials, and American citizens -- celebrated the end of the campaign. At the largest U.S. Mission event on record, non-American guests participated in a mock-vote; took pictures with the candidates' cut-outs (printed copies of the photos offered to them as "favors" at their departure); engaged with Embassy officials on the facets of the U.S. electoral process; viewed on various screens across the room live news coverage, the presidential debates and the candidates' biography films; and cheered on Mozambican university students as they did a mock debate playing the roles of Obama, McCain, Biden, and Palin. The Charge d'Affaires later hosted an early breakfast on November 5 for a group of 30 Ambassadors and government officials, fortuitously timed to coincide with President-Elect Obama's victory speech.

ENTHUSIASM HIGH IN THE FINAL MONTH  
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¶3. Turnout on November 4 was so high in part due to sustained elections programming beginning in July. We used our Public Affairs Center to show all four U.S. Debates (taped). While we could not offer them in Portuguese, enthusiastic students, most of whom have at least some English, attended and watched attentively. The PAO and PDO led discussions afterwards to clarify concepts like "Joe the Plumber" and to engage the audience on what they thought not only of the candidates' performance but on the style of American debates. Responding to the interest on campuses, Public Affairs took one of the debate programs outside of town to 100 students at the Higher Institute of International Relations (ISRI).

¶4. On October 8, we supported two local NGOs -- the Center for Mozambican and International Studies (CEMO) and the Martin Luther King Institute (IMALK) - for a panel discussion on the U.S. Election and foreign policy to a crowd of 200 at a local hotel. Two Embassy officers spoke respectively on each party/candidate, with a local media editor and a university professor giving commentary. The following Q and A led to some debating, "Would an Obama presidency really benefit Africa more?" The media commentator underscored that the Bush Administration has given unprecedented levels of aid to Africa and cited PEPFAR, PMI and MCC. (The distribution of our

Mission newsletter "Estamos Juntos" at the event likely helped spur the idea.)

#### STUDENT DEBATES KICK OFF AROUND TOWN

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¶5. The October 8 event served as a catalyst for a series of student debates with university students around the Maputo area that followed in the four weeks leading up to Election Day. Four student finalists were selected from that debate series. Representing the Democratic and Republican parties, they squared off in true American-style debates (Presidential and Vice Presidential) at our Election Night celebration. In Mozambique, where gender equality suffers, guests were enthralled by the petite young female student representing Joe Biden; the international relations student had studied the Democratic Senator's policies to a tee and gave a riveting performance deserving of the large crowd that enthusiastically gathered around the stage to see her. (A male candidate stood opposite her playing Sarah Palin.) The debates were moderated by accomplished journalist and editor Salomao Moyane, who had covered the final U.S. Presidential debate in New York on the Foreign Press Center's October tour.

¶6. While most programming was in or near Maputo, the Charge used his trip to the northern city of Nampula to give the mostly Muslim population there a chance to engage with him on the U.S. elections. In an informal setting at Nampula's Catholic University, the Charge took questions on the candidates' policies and the electoral process from a group of 65 students, educators and media members.

#### MOZAMBICAN JOURNALISTS OFFER A FIRST-HAND VIEW

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¶7. In addition to Moyane), we assisted two other prominent Mozambican journalists to travel to the U.S. during the elections

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period: a Noticias (state-owned daily national newspaper) writer attended the Edward R. Murrow International Visitor program and sent in regular stories about his experience engaging American citizens across the nation. Independent media Soico editor participated in the Foreign Press Center's "embed" tour, spending three weeks in the United States and doing live (call-in) broadcasts on S-TV, which is now a station with near national reach. His more than dozen articles in the newspaper O Pais gave Mozambicans a chance to understand the U.S. elections from the perspective of a respected Mozambican voice.

¶8. On November 5, the Charge held a press conference in his home to talk about the results. Fifteen media reps, including three editors, came and quoted the Charge's comments in that evening and the next day's news. Due to IIP's fast translation work for us, we sent out translated Portuguese versions of the President-Elect's victory speech and the concession speech by Senator McCain. The former was used in at least two newspapers.

¶9. Finally, from November 4 - 5, two Mozambican television stations, S-TV and TIM (Independent Television of Mozambique) did special hours-long block reports on our Elections Night event interspersed with the results coming in from the U.S. TIM featured a lengthy interview with the PAO, who explained in Portuguese the concepts of National Party Conventions and the Electoral College, and also aired several interviews with Americans and Mozambicans from our grand event. Both stations broadcasted the IIP-produced short videos on "Obama Volunteers" and "McCain Volunteers" which we had subtitled in Portuguese for them.

#### INFORMATION CENTER AT ELECTIONS NIGHT GALA A HIT

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¶10. In addition to providing copies of elections-themed e-Journals and translated America.gov and IIP publications, such as the candidates' bios/family bios and articles on their expected Africa policies at our IRC, American Corners and other events, guests at the November 4 bash visited a mini-information center where they

could collect IIP materials. The IIP elections PowerPoint formed the backdrop for the Mission panelists' presentations on the U.S. electoral process, while the two short IIP videos on campaign volunteers were a huge hit with party guests. Visitors to the IRC continue to ask for information on President-elect Obama and the electoral process.

IT'S NOT OVER YET  
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¶11. The Obama victory continues to dominate headlines. Taking advantage of the sustained interest, the PDO chose as our monthly Public Affairs Center movie on November 6 the biography film on President-Elect Obama. It was one of the best-attended film screenings to date; participants also received copies of Obama and McCain speeches translated overnight by IIP.

COMMENT: Profound Impact a Unique Opportunity  
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¶12. The new ground broken in our political experience has resonated strongly here. Mozambicans currently campaigning for their own elections here are evoking the American experience; analysts and commentators are publicly asking, "What about Africa? What about Mozambique?", questioning whether this continent can get over racial and ethnic divisions as the United States has appeared to have accomplished. The transparency of our entire elections process, from the primaries to the conventions to the concession speech and President Bush's open cooperation with President-Elect Obama has deeply impressed Mozambicans and led them to call for the same.

¶13. Floods of emails, cell phone text messages and phone calls came in after November 4 congratulating our Elections Night event and our new President-Elect. We face a time of amazing opportunity to win over skeptical Mozambicans now heartened by the elections. This nation's founding father's widow, American citizen Janet Mondlane, told the Charge and PAO at a recent lunch that "This is the time to bring together the peoples of both countries," and we plan on doing so with increased outreach, taking advantage of new exchange program offerings like YES (Youth Exchange and Study) and working up until and after January 20 to explain what is "a peaceful transition in the world's most powerful nation."

¶14. The success of Mission programs was greatly aided by the volume, variety, and quality of IIP materials we received, and the speed with which they were translated into Portuguese, so we send our thanks to IIP/Africa and the translation office in Cape Verde.

CHAPMAN